



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

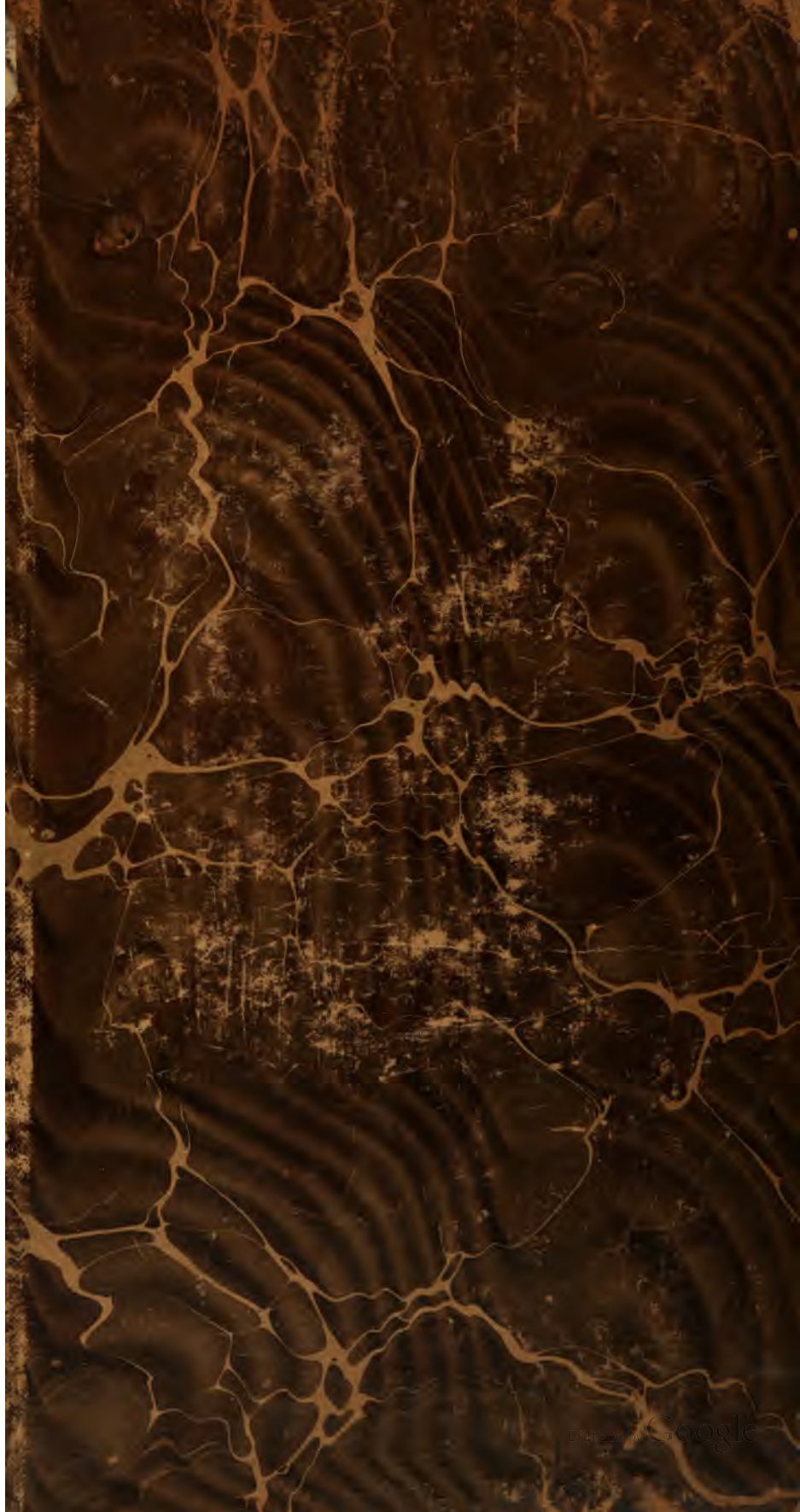
Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



ALA 1043-92



HARVARD COLLEGE
LIBRARY



FROM THE LIBRARY OF

IRVING BABBITT

CLASS OF 1889

Professor of French Literature

1912-1933

17
19
20
21
24
29
30-1
32
39

- 13atbitt - Thanking him for his
kind letter.

Van Wyck Brooks

March 18: 1911

THE SOUL: AN ESSAY TOWARDS A POINT OF VIEW

BY

VAN WYCK BROOKS

*O beata solitudo
O sola beatitudo*

SAN FRANCISCO

1910

~~AL 979.7.95~~
✓

*
ALA 1049.92
✓

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE LIBRARY OF
PROF. IRVING BABBITT
SEPT. 28, 1933

R. H. A.

Digitized by Google

I.

THE life of a child is indeed that of a chameleon. Who forbade us then to live many lives which had no resemblance to each other? By what magic was it given us then to see that nothing contradicts anything else? We threw off the solemn weight of consistency and in a winter's afternoon, without stirring from the four walls of a room, experienced all the modes of being. And if in later years we feel that then we were above all natural, can we doubt that the destiny of man is to experience the whole of life? Or shall we conclude that a golden age was given us, not as a vision to which life can be made to conform, but as a consolation for what it cannot be?

II.

But in youth a fact confronts us. A man has actually to be something, and therefore he cannot be other things as well. And again, to be something implies that one has to do something. The social world opens before us and requires of us an economy of morals, a singleness of aim. We possess qualities that cannot exist together in a human being. What selection is to be made? What is to be kept, encouraged, fostered in ourselves?

III.

Everything we do is the realization of something we have thought or of something our ancestors have thought for us. And our life is the projection of all those thoughts that have the special kind of vitality required for visible existence. They are few indeed beside the multitudinous thoughts which have a different vitality,—those which cannot express themselves because they are framed for a different set of circumstances than that in which they find themselves. Every thought that is born in the heart begs to be allowed to live, to share our life. If we deny it life it will die, and is it well to carry within us things that are dead? One thought is born as a kiss, one as an empire, one as an act of mercy. These are thoughts that life can contain because there are those to kiss, those

to conquer, and those to pity. But not less real than these are thoughts that we call happiness, love, and truth.

Does life contain these things, throw back to us these mysteries, laid bare of all they contain which torments us?

Life can offer us nothing but a multitude of objects upon which we can expend ourselves and in doing so forget that we desire all, all, all.

IV.

Perhaps we should be less fortunate if life allowed us a wider latitude. It would then be a sleep in which we should expend ourselves in the way that nature seems to intend, unconsciously, as if in deep weariness after one eternity and as if in preparation for the second eternity to which only death shall open our eyes.

Then indeed the sleep of life would be untroubled with splendid dreams and we should have passed through it like elemental forces which have not yet become ripe to assume individual consciousness. Nature indeed does her best to postpone that day when we shall be free, for a little instant, to accuse her if we feel a force in our pretensions or to thank her for so tenderly keeping us in ignorance of their futility. Or what if nature understands that the human heart is of such a kind that the terms of life cannot express it, cannot do it justice? How can we accuse her who has laboured to prevent us from becoming aware of ourselves, to keep our motives obscure, to destroy in us the faculty of criticism which can only teach us that we are better than the materials we are allowed to work in? Is death then not even a rebuke? Perhaps it is rather a silent opening of the door—without the irony of an invitation—back into an eternity which appears to be second best only because we fancy that failure in life is the same as failure in us. . . .

V.

When I thought of this it seemed to me that humanity was like a vast ocean which contained all things known and unknown and was without a bottom. And the lives of men were like so many ships, great full-rigged barks and small vessels, carefully built up and sealed against the storm, sailing, tacking, drifting across this

ocean. Some sailed swiftly, with vigilant pilots, as if they steered for a distant shore: but this ocean had no shore. Now and again one of these pilots dropped a plummet into the sea. And as it struck the pilot would take his bearings from this depth, supposing it to be the bottom. But this bottom was in reality, though he did not know it, only the wreckage of other ships floating under the surface.

Then I said, I will be this ocean: and if I have to be a ship I will be only a raft for the first wave to capsize and sink. . . .

VI.

Here, surely, something was utterly wrong. Existence could not be wrong, for existence is all there is to give us the meaning of right and wrong. The mistake then must lie in what is made of life. Perhaps, I thought, I shall understand better if I consider exactly what is the composition of a man. A man is a certain gathering of elements like water and air,—such as compose the universe. Now, in the universe there are actually no dimensions. Things are only greater or smaller after they have been applied to a touchstone which exists in man himself and forms his point of view. A single flame is fire, and just as simply fire as a whole conflagration. It takes its form as flame when it unites with certain other elements, and passes back into its infinite condition when those other elements have exhausted the impulse which for the moment combined them. But how can there be any such thing as quantity of flame, when all flame comes out of infinity and returns to infinity? None at all, except from the point of view of life itself, which measures things in relation to its own period of manifestation, that is according to a given conception of time and space. And life itself is just such another flame. No man therefore can be greater or smaller than another man except in relation to the time and space of what he calls life.

VII.

Certainly the gradual process by which we become accustomed to life turns our attention more and more from the spectacle of a

shifting universe, dims the inward eye, replaces the mood of wonder in the presence of immense and undiscovered forces to a mood of lesser possibilities, probabilities, and what we call facts. A child newly born has no sense of dimension: it knows simply that there are some things you can hold in your hand and some you cannot. But we begin to speculate and in doing so to compare. And we are filled at once with a sense of our own insignificance. Yet we do not see that we feel ourselves insignificant only because we compare ourselves with stars. No sooner do we consider ourselves to be entities than we colour all else with our mood and everything becomes to us an entity. The world becomes one, the universe of worlds another, and as we have created the idea of large and small, how very small must we needs seem beside immensities for which we have devised a scale?

What chagrin then falls upon us! What catalepsy! We fly to each other to distract ourselves from the insane remembrance and to reassure ourselves that there are others, ephemeral and without protection even as we are.

But alas! even our comforters are not exempt from the judgment we carry with us. Gnats that we think ourselves, we introduce a scale by which some appear to be greater gnats and some lesser, and we are never more pleased than when some illusion justifies our discovery of men more insignificant than we.

Life then turns into a competition. We pass it in accumulating unrealities, and even in solitude we keep our minds steadfastly upon all things that are able to distract us from the thought of our destiny lest for one moment the inward voice might reach us and give the lie to our endeavours. . . .

VIII.

I read lately a book by Anatole France in which the philosopher, Monsieur Bergeret, discovers that he has once for all to do with an impossible wife. He does not return unkindness for unkindness. He remains calm with all the high tolerance of disillusion. Day follows day, but still he says nothing. The servants, awed, frozen, go away,—the heart of that household is broken. And silent amid

the ruins, pinnaced upon the cold heights of judgment, principle, reason, the philosopher sits and surveys the waste places of disenchantment.

Here is most reasonable truth. But I, too, was frozen by it. To know that you are nothing, that other men are nothing, that life and time are nothing—surely this is not so true as to believe that all these things are a little something, and to be rather careless now and again just how little or big they are.

Above all, I thought, we are born to be undignified, to be of the scufflers, of the scramblers, of the ragamuffins, to answer back, to strike back, to lose our tempers when others lose their temper, to be fallible when the only way to forgive is by being fallible—lest that precious fatalism of ours heap coals of fire upon some blundering head.

What can be the value of a conception of truth if the soul thereby imagines that it has found the final truth—a truth final enough to justify this massacre of love?

IX.

As I thought over this book I asked myself what was the innermost motive of Monsieur Bergeret's point of view. Did he perhaps consider his own destiny more important than that of his wife or his servants? No, it was the reverse of this. He could not be so ingenuous, under the eye of eternity, as to feel more important than the least of his servants. The fatal thing was that he considered himself of no importance, not because he felt humble but because he felt small. Humility is free and full of joy. The man who feels himself small is a slave aware of slavery and full of pride. It was because Monsieur Bergeret felt himself to be of no importance that he returned the compliment to all creation. He thought himself sufficiently unimportant to make his unimportance an issue, a criterion: whereas a humble man does not stop to think of his unimportance because he does not think of himself at all,—the soul breaks down its dams, floods out in all directions, and becomes lost in the energy of the universe. How can there be anything petty but the moods in which we think things petty!

X.

As I thought of those I care for, a vision of human nature came over me, exquisite in its hidden movements, its nuances, its interior gestures. I thought of all those whom I know in a hard way, of all the pure intentions I had overlooked. How much of life I had faced through the veil of other men's opinions! And what else is an opinion than a more or less final statement of one's own ignorance? Here was a man of whom I had said an unkind thing. What need to recall the shame in which I afterwards discovered facts more than enough to explain away the trait with which I had found fault. Where then lay the fault if not with me, who had no facts but that of ignorance to palliate my criticism?

Truly we cannot be less than tender, serious, and merciful. To caress life with its little fragile offerings of light, to reject nothing but the fixed forms of half-truths, to learn without cynicism to see through everything as one sees through a crystal, to be in solution, in perpetual readiness, to be as responsive as mercury, to have instant sympathy with everything in the very moment it comes to our attention, never to think ourselves small because the universe is large, to be conscious of ourselves only in moments of growth, to quit nothing until we have begun to see the nobility in it, to wait and hope and dream until the whole world has become vibrant with sense and the apparency of things has melted away and we see in everything a connection with everything else, meaning within meaning—surely this, or something like this, might be truth. ✓

XI.

What unhappy burden lies upon us that we are impelled, by some inward contumacy and almost from the moment of birth, to pervert our destiny in so far as we have the mastery of it? We who have invented the angels in our own likeness—how do we come instinctively to reverse the invention and to forget in the end that any likeness exists?

Last evening at a street corner I saw a group of boys tormenting a blind beggar whose only object was, if possible, to escape their

notice. Actuated by the social spirit, each of them deadened in himself the natural impulse before it had had time to declare itself. Shortly afterwards as I returned that way I saw that the group was dispersed and he who had been its animating spirit was now leading the blind man across the street. Thus in company with others we insensibly blight the rare and fragile blossoms of pure intention which have sprung up in solitary hours.

We lose faith in ourselves because year follows year and there is no deposit, no formula, no finality. We learn to distrust ourselves because we are individuals. And yet when we wish counsel or inspiration we do not turn to the many but to the one soul because the real things are not social things. We turn to the individual whose counterpart we have ignored in ourselves. Strange law by which we renounce what we consider ignoble in ourselves only to discover its nobility in another guise!

Securus judicat orbis terrarum—that is a profound saying. But the judgment of the world is not the judgment of any part of it to which the individual can have access. If you ask yourself what it is that the whole world believes and what it wishes, in all places and all times, how few, how rare, how deep will those wishes be, how holy and how simple those beliefs. It is only a larger soul, solitary, speechless, and full of dreams.]

XII.

We turn to the individual not that we may be understood, but loved, and that through love the soul may be confirmed, grow conscious of itself, feel its power to do, to suffer, to think, to live,—in a word, come into its own. But we ask the world to understand us and spend our lives explaining ourselves, as if that were a necessary thing. For certainly it is a good thing not to be too well understood. Misunderstandings develop us more than anything else. When we are misunderstood we have a renewed sense of our own personality. We collect ourselves, we shape ourselves, we seem to see over the heads of things. But when we are perfectly understood we empty ourselves.

XIII.

We learn our own fate in observing the fate of those we care for. Gradually this inner world, this little unconventional world of our friends merges itself in the other world we have all so fervently taught ourselves to abhor. From personalities we become caricatures and finally types. And these types we become are types which have always been perfectly familiar to us, perfectly ridiculous to us. Some little exceptional trait keeps us from recognizing the likeness when we have assumed the rôle. How much we make of that exceptional trait! . . . When I was quite small I read *Don Quixote*, and over this wonderful world of sad and merry beings there lay a mist of sunlight and moonlight as of some faraway country in the clouds. Lately, once more, I read it through and—oh, the tragic wonder of it!—all those figures had taken on a most familiar, a most amazing significance. It was like a funeral, the funeral of youth perhaps, where all my friends had suddenly gathered together from the corners of the earth. There they were, one and all, and there, the most preposterous absurdity of all, in the guise of a barber, was I! . . .

XIV.

How does the soul thus become walled about, local, definitely and awkwardly formed? Why should life contain nothing but the *fait accompli* and what is certain in the end to become the *fait accompli*? The social ideal is that of unselfishness. But see the result: hardly a fine thing that is not held to be impracticable. Are we not perhaps too ready to consider ourselves selfish? Do we not permit our passions of social generosity to dispossess the finer intuitions of an ultimate humanity? Are suffering and error without really the corollaries of our own weakness and self-absorption? Is not our eagerness to alleviate these things only the better side of the universal mistake—that of being untrue to one's self? If the individual is the measure of society how can he understand society until he understands himself? Does not the whole of humanity advance in us as we advance in ourselves? And yet everything on earth stands like a flaming sword between a man and the intimacy

of his own soul. Is a man fit to renounce himself before he has confirmed himself? Or can he confirm himself by renouncing that which makes him capable of love?

Unselfishness is, roughly, doing what we do not want to do. But really what we want or do not want has nothing to do with the question. The perfect thing in Christ was that he never had to surrender anything: he was perfectly happy because he had no self-will. We approach happiness not by surrendering things, but by tending towards an inward point where we have nothing to surrender. It gives us pain to surrender things because we are secretly convinced that the things we surrender are valuable. But when, without bitterness, we are able to see that these things are without value, we are only made more free by ridding ourselves of them. . . .

Counting over to myself the great souls of history who have shown men how to be true to themselves, I came upon the author of that book, unmentioned where men gather together, which has in solitary hours recalled numberless millions to freedom and peace.

XV.

In Thomas á Kempis we see above all the solitary man, absorbed in that self which is the measure of the inmost heart of the world.

His mortal years are ninety and of these more than seventy are passed in a single cloister. In the yellow sun of the convent garden, as I fancy, he sits among the bees and the flowers, the slender shadows of a great lilac bush falling silently upon his lap and his crossed hands. His imagination gathers together only the memories which contribute to a sense of ineffable calm, a mood of resignation, of silence, and of peace.

So little can ever happen along that path bordered by flowering shrubs, among the grasses, and by the marble seat! A lizard's rustle, the murmuring of bees, the coming of spring with its procession of gentle events, the stirring and spreading of the blossoms—sunlight and contemplation.

He hears the voice of a quail interrogating the wind, a solitary locust winding off its wiry coil of sound: everywhere an unceasing monotone of ground insects. These tiny voices calling to him out

of the grass, noisy in the naive gladness of things newly arrived, pathetically assert that little as they are they have yet passed beyond the songless worms and are marching upward to the citadels of society. But he does not rebuke them with his wisdom, even if he has arrived only to discover that silence is better.

Here like rosebuds in this garden the fragile thoughts of the *Imitation* disclose themselves and he cries with inward rapture: "How sweet it is to love, to be dissolved, and to swim in love!" In the presence of this soul, dissolved in love, the spirits of moral violence, rebuke, propaganda reveal their limitations and confess that they are transitory almost as the forces they oppose. "Against all evil suspicion of other persons and indignation at wrong-doing," he says, "think of all thy own faults from the day of thy birth, and cease to be angry at others." Humility, Patience, Obedience, Poverty dawn upon us like stars in the twilight, and we begin to understand those ironical words of Pascal: "Cæsar was too old, it seems to me, to go about amusing himself by conquering the world. . . . He ought to have been more mature."

XVI.

But if this man seems to us wholly

"pale with weariness
Of climbing heaven,"—

if we ask in what way he faces the fact of existence, we shall find that he has derived a lesson from his dreams. In him we see that intense practicality toward the little intimate things about him and about those with whom he lives which is always the mark of minds luminously aware of the vanity behind the greater institutions of the world.

The task he finds before him is that of transcribing the sacred manuscripts. To this he gives himself with reverence and minute care, as we can see from various works of devotion copied exquisitely by his hand which have come down to our day. This reverence which confers nobility upon labour he sought to inspire in those younger monks who were disposed to be inattentive. Thus in his *Manual Parvulorum*, composed for them, he says with a kind

of tender worldliness: "And when thou art dead many shall speak well of thee when they read thy volumes, and what was once written by thee with so great care." . . .

This calm, determinate practicality assures the authenticity of his vision and stamps it with that simplicity which is the origin of all miracles and which baffles the conventional mind.

XVII.

In the outer world we resort to science as the criterion of truth. Formerly, as in Faust, Paracelsus, and the old alchemists, the scientist and the mystic were one. Today they confirm each other and, were the scientist not compelled to be a specialist, they would again unite forces; for it is precisely such laws as those of the indestructibility of matter, the conservation of energy, and the evolution of species, obtained by experiment, which the mystic has always divined through intuition at the roots of life. . . . As I thought of that cry of Thomas á Kempis: "How sweet it is to love, to be dissolved, and to swim in love!", I saw in this very sense of the sweetness of dissolution precisely that which animated S. Francis at the moment of death. By some quick intuition of precisely these laws of science, a passionate love for the elements composing his body and soul became articulate in him at the approach of dissolution. We are told that he stretched forth his hands and cried with joy, "Welcome, Sister Death!" And then he began to sing, and summoning his brothers he bade them join with him and sing the Canticle of the Sun, "who brings us the day and who brings us the light, our sister the moon, our brother the wind, and the air and cloud, our sister water, so humble, precious, and clean, and at last our sister the Death of the body, whom no man may escape." And from this hour until his death the house where he lay rang day and night with his songs. This was he who had been God's jester. . . .

XVIII.

As I considered this life passed utterly without solace of comfort, food, money, or esteem, and of this death seraphical in love,

I thought of the latter days of another man, in the eyes of the social world the greatest of the modern age—Martin Luther.

Surrounded by his abundant German family, comfortable, the idol of a nation, he said in sober weariness: "The world for these two hundred years has hated no one as it hates me. I in turn have no love for the world. I know not that in all my life I have ever felt real enjoyment. I am well tired of it. God come soon and take me away."

Here was a contrast of great significance. These two men were alike of the first order as immense spiritual forces, affecting the destiny of the whole world; and here they were, placed in analogous positions in regard to life and death. Here if anywhere lay the point of departure for a just comparison of their fundamental attitudes.

And the distinction was approximately this: Luther was a master of the worldly situation. He was a dominant will. He had stood upon a firm conviction of the truth and all the world he cared for had swung round to him with a triumphant unison of praise, honour, and moral appreciation. As a result of this he had all worldly solace, a comfortable home, a loving wife, children, friends. He was the mightiest bourgeois the world had ever seen. It was the logical result of his great struggle. In the pulpit, the market-place, the battlefield, wherever men are gathered together for action, moral or physical, the whole world shouts with one voice a shout which has echoed through four centuries, "All praise to Luther!" And even the Catholic Church, in conclave, when the doors are closed, registers a silent vote of thanks to this man who confirmed in the modern world the organization of Christianity. So universal is the gratitude of society to any man who upholds it: substantial response, moral or material. And such a man was Luther from the first. When at the opening of his campaign he sent the Elector a copy of his thundering denunciation of the papacy, the Elector secretly and as a sign of moral support sent him a basket of game. . . . But he was a weary man without love.

S. Francis, on the other hand, was a moral failure. His only grief was that the rule he had established had become an organization, and had in this measure lost its freshness in the heart of

each of his followers. He had in the worldly sense succeeded to a degree which afflicted him. But even this, to him a sign of his own failure, only served to touch with sadness—to mellow and make more human—the divine joy of that blithe soul.

He lay upon boards and his food was bread and water. The poor body could not contain its love, its happiness, life could not contain it, and he fell into trances, saw visions, dreamed dreams, lived at one time many lives, lived in illusions, in the lives of those who loved him, in the lives even of birds and fishes, saw himself existing in water, in the clouds, in the wind—so insatiable was the sense of life within him. And at the moment of death he had so identified himself with the whole life of the universe that his death seemed but another trance. There was no longer anything to be separated. The soul had passed out of the body by its gradual identification with all created things, and only the body was left to contribute its share to the life of the worms and the flowers.

XIX.

When I remember him I become suddenly unconventional. And if I think of any man about me or in history as a Catholic, a Protestant, a plebeian, a bourgeois, an aristocrat, it is with a counteracting sense of the fluidity of life. Nor is it helpful to use these categories unless we are continually aware that we are speaking first of humanity and of human beings.

How is it possible, in considering history, to feel that one has a right to like or dislike, approve or disapprove of any character? This indulgence we can permit ourselves only to our contemporaries, whom we see only in action and in whom we perceive only results. But if we look back into history we realize the futility of summary judgments. Every act of every man who figures there has its compensating cause, and we respond prematurely and with injustice to ourselves if we stop short and form an opinion without penetrating to that cause. So that, when all is said, the man we love is merely the fortunate man, whom circumstances in the high sense have favoured. The Greeks understood this and frankly honoured the fortunate man, on the eternal principle that to him that hath shall be given. Thus in their tragedy—of Orestes, I think—

a group of exiles honour the hero in the very fact that they have reason to congratulate him: "Fortunate man, we honour thee that thou shalt at some time return to thy country."

Keats in his *Ode to a Nightingale* has the same Greek intuition:

"'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot
But being too happy in thy happiness."

and again:

"Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan."

He honours the nightingale because its life has not been marred by circumstances, and he becomes happy in its happiness.

And because we know that sorrow and misery too often rather bedraggle than enrich us, we revere the pure in heart and those to whom temptation is not temptation. We bless the little children divining that until we have become like them, not by renunciation but by a second birth, we cannot find happiness.

Looking upon them we live in their lives our own better lives and we revere in them the ideal which perpetually evades our own situation.

XX.

The facts of his origin contributed to the growth in S. Francis of an exquisite inward and outward grace. He was the son of one of those successful merchants who are pleased, perhaps for their own vanity, to give their sons every chance to adopt the ways of the aristocracy: an aristocracy then still feudal, saturated through and through with the sentiment of *noblesse oblige*. Francis became a gentleman in this ancient and most noble sense and although his morals were no doubt all wrong, he became filled with that benign spirit which is able, when it comes to blossom, to do away with morals and substitute in their place love. We see him in his period of worldly extravagance a courteous and graceful soul, tender in friendship, careless of material things, gay, chivalrous, incapable of dogma. And in him we observe the spectacle of a gentle transition, a transfusion of ideas, a gradual inward illumination. In him the feudal gentleman finally utters himself and is

merged with the poor, the outcast, and the unfortunate. Extremes meet; and if we examine history we shall find that the two ends of society have always been one in heart because abundant in human nature, while both have been feared and suspected by the conventional classes between.

XXI.

Before commerce had grown into a controlling force, the feudal gentleman found himself, by the exercise of his natural courage, in possession of the material field. So universal were knightly and mystical ideas of life that the Church, appearing to men as the bride of Christ, perpetually in danger of being destroyed by the dragon of this world, enlisted the forces of chivalry in her behalf. She played Andromeda to the world's Perseus, and by her very poverty of heart became the treasury of the material world.

Thus we find in the Rome of Luther's time, the astonishing paradox of the building of S. Peter's, the monument of an infinite vision expressed in material terms more sumptuous than a material motive could have conceived, and thus expressed by means of the sale of passports into eternity. The pilgrimage of Tetzels, which supplied Luther with a point of departure, was a culminating menace to the social order.

In the Reformation the social order rights itself. And when we consider this fact and think once more of the individual soul we see clearly how the Catholic organization has failed equally with the Protestant, if in a nobler cause. . . . The fair lady in distress is not permitted to remain in distress because the brave knight comes to her assistance: and thus her very fragility becomes a positive factor in the struggle for existence. But when she becomes aware of this she resorts to her weakness as a weapon. Having learned that the meek shall inherit the earth, she becomes all the more meek in order that she may be the more certain to inherit the earth.

From this have come all the vices of women and also all those of the Catholic Church.

Its weakness became, in a word, dogmatic, positive and, so to speak, a basis of exchange. Introduced into the world of fact it became an organization. And thus the Catholic Church presents the paradoxical spectacle of a vast army of hermits; struggling to

unite the ideas of celibacy, contemplation, and perfectionism with a social order of its own by means of which it seeks to propagate these ideas.

It is the infinite imposing itself upon the finite by finite means.

Hence the Catholic Church is composed promiscuously of saints, vagabonds, seraphic doctors, cutthroats, martyrs, harlots, the poor, the sumptuous — all that is unexpected, bizarre, exaggerated and unconventional. It has in the highest measure the inward humility of the individual and the outward pomp of the collective mind. It is deficient in the morality of the social order because it is informed inwardly with all the flexible qualities of the natural soul. The Catholic falls lower and rises higher than the Protestant because he is taught what are called the heavenly virtues at the expense of the social virtues.

Almost in our own time the controversy between Newman and Kingsley was an illustration of this. Newman in the essential nobility of his heart was perpetually thwarted by his conviction of the institutional side of the Catholic Church. His arguments, ever attempting to make the two ideas compatible, became, like all Catholic reasoning, outwardly sophistical. Kingsley, speaking for the inflexible middle-class forces of social order, attacked him as a "liar." The social mind never examines deeply enough to see that a lie is merely a relative term which has no correspondence in a mind whose intentions are pure. Accordingly, our social sympathies go to Kingsley while our inner and personal sympathies go to Newman. Both appear as the victims of organization: to the one we respond with the mind, to the other with the heart. In effect, we feel that Newman was a pure mind and Kingsley an impure mind.

XXII.

The contemplative ideal of the middle ages, and especially in the period immediately before the Reformation, was but one type of the growing pressure of our intuitive sense of the elements composing us which culminated in the age of science, confirming it in the field of knowledge.

There was also in that period an awakening of the social sense, for in the midst of a universal agitation all things come to life.

History, which admits of no coincidences, will contend that, springing as they do from a common tumult, they are to have immediately a common end. Long before Luther, we find the Reformation stirring through the north of Europe. Violent conversions took place everywhere and the first great converted region was the valley of the Rhine. Now the Rhine valley was the great centre and highway of commerce and the first to be converted were the commercial folk. Old chroniclers tell how these eager merchants left their meals and their most urgent business to hear the sermons of traveling devotees. Here are the seeds of Protestantism. The vehement preacher is by no means the saint, nor is the violent conversion by any means an inward illumination. There was nothing impassioned or dogmatic about the exhortations of Christ: they were not based upon any substantial conviction of the necessity of redoubling the virtues of this world, but the emanations, luminous and fragile, of an elemental vision. There is—who shall deny it?—a lesser vision which wins the suffrage of those who find a sufficient holiness in the social order. This it is which grips the heart, setting it toward virtue, which inspires the philanthropist and those capable of a moral propaganda. The mission of Wesley, for example, was not for those whom Catholics call, in the sublime phrase, God's poor. It was for the middle classes, imbued with the idea of commerce and of social regeneration. And the fruits of violent conversion are the rebirth and strengthening of all that binds the world more harmoniously together. S. Paul was converted in this way, and S. Paul gave the teaching of Christ its formula and its moral efficiency. Luther was converted in this way, by a flash of lightning which struck the earth at his feet. S. Francis was never converted in this sense at all: he did not suddenly drop one form of life to adopt another.

Nor can sudden transitions ever be characteristic of souls which have at any time the capacity of divining the illusions of reality.

Those numerous preaching mystics who so effectively converted the burgher merchants of the Rhine valley were, it is true, from one point of view, so many premature and tentative Luthers: and in their influence they contributed to the cause of Luther and prepared the way for him. Dr. Tauler describes the two mortal sins

as pride and inordinate affection, and the two immortal virtues as humility and absolute submission to God. A highly convenient social construction can, of course, be put upon these mystical definitions; and the more loudly they are expounded, Protestantwise, the more convenient they become. In reality they are untinged with the spirit of Luther and as menacing to the social order as the uninterpreted words of Christ. We are told that Gerard Groote yielded to the furious opposition of the priests in authority and gave over his preaching because he was unwilling to "raise up a tumult of the people against the clergy." History will describe this incident as a sign that the times were not yet ripe for the people to understand their power. In the points of view of both Tauler and Groote, the Protestant historian will find only the tentative beginnings of modern democracy, while the Catholic historian, reversing the attitude, will find in them only the seeds of modern revolt. From the point of view of social history, this preaching and practice of humility and submission, no longer in the cloister, but in the world, will have its relative place in a transitional age.

In themselves they are not relative but absolute, and although they take a colour from ideals which in the middle ages were able to assert themselves in the midst of society, they are but emanations of the natural soul, a menace to Protestant and Catholic alike.

XXIII.

Having gone thus far I feel that I am in search of a word. I have been speaking of the natural soul in the midst of life. But what do we mean by the word life? Something, surely, so much like everything that when we follow it into its recesses the senses become transfigured and we return into the daylight of common thought speechless, blind, and with empty hands.

I shall use an illustration, for every least thing life contains is a microcosm of the whole and may be taken as its touchstone. Poetry is the most ancient companion of the human soul and the history of poetry may be taken as a parallel of the soul's history in the midst of life.

XXIV.

The origin of poetry lay in man's feeling of something infinite in him that was in some way hampered by the mortal dress in which he found himself.

The wind, the sea, fire, and the light of the stars had, he felt, some vague identity with himself. They were of his nature and he of theirs: yet they appeared to him to be free and he to himself enslaved. The wind blew across the world, fire came and went like a whim, while he could move only with great effort and could only conjecture what lay beyond the mountains. On every hand he saw nothing but the immense freedom of the universe and his own limitations which kept him from being actually, as he felt himself essentially, at one with it. He felt himself under a curse, which was to become the original sin of dogma. His first impulse was to relieve the pressure of chagrin, to cry out of his heart. In doing so he found relief. He was healed and restored, he had purged himself of that which oppressed him. The elements which had appeared to baffle him fell into concord with him and he felt afresh his own identity with all that composed the universe. What he uttered for his own consolation was reminiscent of this infinite nature and expressed the dilemma in which he found himself. Mingled in it were both sadness and joy: sadness that his destiny was for a moment turned from its course into individual consciousness, joy that it was for all time a part of eternal nature.

Such is all true poetry and such, to the uttermost, is the Cantic of the Sun. It has the properties of consolation which restore one to harmony with the universe.

As the social sense becomes developed this quality becomes less usual and we have to distinguish between poetry and much else that is written in the form of poetry, but is not so.

This distinction does not have to be made in the poetry which has come down to us from primitive civilizations in which the social sense was rudimentary. All primitive poetry is consoling and personal. It is tender, sad, merry, and infinitely touching. Such are these lines from the ballad of Robin Hood:

When he came to grene wode,
 In a mery mornynge,
 There he herde the notes small
 Of byrdes mery syngynge.

"Pluk up thy hert, my dere mayster,"
 Litulle Johne can say,
 "And think hit is a full fayre tyme
 In a mornynge of May."

Here is consolation felt and shared, not in the promise of conquest or of comfort which takes its place in false and social poetry, but in the voices of the elements, the fair spring morning and the small notes of the merry birds. And this fragment of an exquisite point of view has come down to us from a group of outlaws from society, better than society, as the men of those days well knew. For was not Robin Hood the spirit of the green wood, and was not the green wood England's Garden of Eden?

They lived in solitude and their relations with each other were anything but social.

Such a form of expression we have to-day from the real and the rare poets, to whom the world is such another green wood. But we have it also in those moments of every man's life when, so to speak, he finds himself suddenly off his guard and free of society. This is the poetical mood of one in love, who is so accustomed to conventionality that when he is momentarily relieved of it he can express his emotion only in awkward and incoherent sounds which he blushes afterwards to recall. Orthodox language then seems to him common because he has been taught to associate it with common life. And when he is face to face at last with what is real he has to invent a medium worthy of the sensation.

There is a touch of this in the epithet of *Ba*, which Browning applied to his wife. It seems to me that if Browning had been a true native poet he would not have felt the need of this untrue syllable. For the poet is one to whom language is unspoiled and every word a miracle, because he has had no conventional life to give it common associations. Shelley and Keats in their letters found nothing inadequate in the names of Mary and Fanny. Love-talk so-called is in fact sentimental and beneath the dignity of a poet, whose divine tenderness makes luminous the simplest and

purest words. And the so-called language of poetry is only found in poetry that is false.

Sentimentality of this kind is, however, the poetry of the conventional mind.

It is born of that inward pressure of the conventional mind placed in an unconventional situation which demands better bread, as it were, than is made of wheat. Something different, something new, something fresh it cries for, and as it has no art and revolts against words that are used at the dinner table, it takes refuge in vague noises. And as they do in their pathetic way relieve this pressure they become poetry, not in a perverted but in a rudimentary form in which the tone of the voice is made to suffice.

And such, too, are those half-articulate but infinitely tender lullabies of a mother who holds her baby in her arms.

Whenever life leaves its accustomed course for a moment and comes into contact with the elements the poignant need for expression is felt. And in love and motherhood we are indeed summoning a fragment of the air and water of the universe to take our form and dwell among us.

XXV.

But the primitive man who knew nothing of social organization presently became aware that his words were pleasant not merely as a relief to himself, but in themselves,—that they were agreeable not only to his inward but to his outward ear also. He observed that they were pretty things and could, with care, be made prettier. They could be made into playthings.

He found, too, that they consoled not only himself but others, and that by skillfully selecting and using them he could please others so much that they would not need to be consoled, because their minds would be continually distracted from the remembrance of their destiny.

By doing this he found that he could gain a kind of power over others. Words, in brief, possessed a second and very convenient value which grew out of the situation in which he found himself.

Then, too, he observed that there was less need of expressing a sense of exile and solitude, inasmuch as all whom he saw about him

were fellows in his misfortune. He felt the necessity of exercising both his hand and his brain in order to maintain these faculties which more and more came to appear desirable to him: and he found a certain pleasure in this exercise.

Here, after all, was a novel type of existence thrust upon him and able to provide a contentment in its own terms.

Even the elements of which he was formed and from which he had seemed somehow estranged, now appeared subservient to him because he was able to direct them at his own will into temporary and finite forms useful to his own maintenance. Fire, wind, and water, the agents of his inconsolable nostalgia, took their places in a new economy of which he saw that he was fitted to be the director.

He saw in himself a new dignity. He was no longer the chaotic fragment of a nameless and immense force expressing itself through life and replenishing itself through death. He was a commissioned officer having absolute command over what appeared to him a definite portion of space and time. Thus was born the social man.

XXVI.

Still he was aware of an ineradicable desire for happiness.

Exactly what he meant by happiness he was unable to fathom, and the moral philosophers tell us that he has never found it. Certainly not; for in his social person he has always been too wise to look for it. He found that he was only happy when he faced the fact that he was miserable. The happiness sprang out of the misery in solitary moments when he had recourse to his elemental nature and expressed it in love and in dreams. But these moments always made him distrust himself, relaxed his sense of dignity and command, and made him feel unequal to the task he had set himself. He found that social life provided him with something just as good* as happiness, which is pleasure: and that he was evidently intended to reward himself for thinking so much about other people by collecting as many pleasant things as possible.

He even found that there was a greater pleasure than possessing pleasant things, and that was the pleasure of permitting others to

* No doubt the origin of this proverbial phrase.

possess them. So after he had made a collection he distributed it again, and thus became a philanthropist.

He was now entirely pleasant both to himself and others. And he had discovered the secret of being perfect without the least necessity of loving anybody or anything. Steadfast resolution to ignore the elements of his own nature had its effect, his temporary position appeared to him the final one, and he was well assured that life was the ultimate reality.

Expression, too, which had formerly, in hours of need, restored him to himself, had now become his chief means of furthering immediate ends. By words he could command others, unite with others, create organization. And from poetry he turned to rhetoric, which is the poetry of the social man. And in that epoch when the world has arrived at its most complete social organization, when in the Roman Empire every man in the civilized world lives and thinks with reference to a single, centralized, social organization, we find that the literary document most truly emblematic of that epoch is Quintilian's *Institutes of Oratory*. This book is the world's supreme monument to the name of rhetoric.

XXVII.

Perhaps I have reached a point where I may take over the word rhetoric and use it in its general sense.

Rome gave the world rhetoric, both in literature and in life: in literature the rhetoric of Oratory and of Prosody, and in life the rhetoric of Conquest, of Patriotism, of Empire, and of Commerce.

Before the Roman Empire these things had all existed in poetical, that is in personal, form. Demosthenes had been a great orator, but out of the fullness of his heart and without the desire to impress a mob with eloquent and artful words. Aristotle had written his *Poetics* which dealt, however, not with the form but with the matter of poetry. The Spartans loved their country,—died for it, but were incapable of chauvinistic notions about Patriotism. Phœnician merchants had sailed the seas, but with a sense of adventure or the childlike pleasure of possessing things, and were incapable of the solemn absurdity we call Commerce. So it was with Conquest, Empire, Life Insurance and Alms-giving.

The Romans took these various human activities which had always existed in a personal, intimate, and happy way and erected them into monstrous social mechanisms, immense, blind, formal forces existing as ends to which the human arm, brain, and heart were only means.

Thus it came about that the merchant who had formerly been the master of his merchandising now became the plaything of it: and his ambition was not so much to be an excellent merchant himself as to be a more excellent merchant than others. And Alms-giving, which had been a blessing to the giver, became a loveless and scientific duty, a matter of social and exterior justice.

Behind the rhetorician we find in Quintilian the lawyer.

It is by law that worldly motives justify themselves: and in this, I suppose, lies the meaning of S. Paul's naïve and somewhat enigmatical description of it as the strength of sin. Armies conquer and law justifies the conquest: and where you have a Cæsar you must have a Quintilian.

In his description of the education of an orator we observe the child from his first infancy and by every means of discipline schooled in the arts of a man of the world, having all worldly virtues in order to be able to assist in creating and maintaining worldly order and organization.

What the orators did for the local organization of states and communities and the settlement of private disputes, the poets did for empire and the glory of arms. And accordingly the virtues celebrated by Virgil are magnanimity, patriotism, courage in battle, piety in the grandiloquent sense—rhetorical virtues, one and all.

And as to words, they became so entirely playthings that after a few centuries a Florentine humanist remarks: "Diphthongs and consonants are the talk of the town."

XXVIII.

But in this epoch the birth of Christ already announced the return of the individual soul to its true destiny.

So great was the impetus of the social idea that the most natural men, confronted with this reassertion of their proper existence, at once invested it with all the trappings of an institution and in the zeal of scholarship and authority conferred upon it even the sem-

blance of respectability. But as this new organization was founded upon a spiritual conception and was never able to repudiate the personality of Christ, it perpetually gave the lie to itself and contained in its very terms the seeds of a second birth in the individual.

Today society is endeavouring to bind itself together in a moral programme. It assumes that this programme will defeat the rhetoric of civilization by placing more and more individuals in a state where they can become conscious of themselves. Thus it overlooks the everlasting law that institutions exist really not for the sake of those for whom they are organized, but for the sake of those who organize them. The poor, the blind, those who are governed, those who are employed—who understands their lives which are, in the sublime phrase, hidden with God, working out through suffering and weakness the mysterious destiny of the soul? They that govern are they that have arrived at conclusions which are false in the mere fact of being conclusions. Life has brought them nothing but opinion and with opinion failure.

XXIX.

In everything there is but one law—that of compensation, but one touchstone—that of the elemental soul.

A natural man is able to survive outward success because it brings him precisely the same measure of inward humility. Thus he is purged and remains true to himself. Those who are in danger of losing their souls are those who have no outward success to purge them and who erect suffering into pride and abstinence itself into a compensating luxury. Thus with virtue itself they shut off the last refuge of the soul.

Sorrow, love, joy are so high that they have to be approached with a certain ritual. Approached carelessly, the mention of them appears to be sentimental and we revolt against them and call them untrue,—but only to rebuke the meddler. For we do not allow everyone to speak of such things.

XXX.

I saw that people who lived much in the world spoke little of sorrow, love and joy. But here was Mary Magdalene, who pos-

sessed them and gave them forth when the disciples turned away faithless. They who had had no outer life had been familiar with these things, but to her, who had come at the eleventh hour, had been given a greater reward than theirs—the power of being faithful.

She alone divined perfectly the message of Christ and she had nothing but love.

The disciples had in some degree been watching, noting, reasoning, teaching, formulating, propagating this message.

But to her it came so intimately, so utterly, that there was nothing for her to say, nothing for her to do. She had reached an inward point where there was no self to be unselfish. Faith had arrived where it no longer needed works to give it reality. And by thus becoming the very measure of the human heart, she outgrew in one flash all the obligations, the responsibilities, the moralities of society.

Her life we guess: and the more sumptuous it becomes in our imagination the more poignant becomes the reality of her love. The disciples had from the first denied themselves, even where they might have possessed, worldly solace. For years they had received the message and lived it. And yet when the final instant came she had the reward. She was permitted then to be true to nature and they were not.

P I was puzzled now when I recalled Luther and S. Francis, for with them the situation appeared to be the reverse. It was Luther who had possessed worldly solace in the outward sense, just as Mary had possessed it: while S. Francis, like the disciples, had lived without comfort and without pleasure.

Again, from the social point of view, I saw that still another puzzling rearrangement had to be made. Luther and the disciples had been unselfish where Mary and Francis had been self-absorbed. Luther and the disciples had been morally consistent, while Mary and Francis had ignored and offended morality.

Moreover, Luther and the disciples had given their lives to the expression, in word and deed, of the truth that was in them: while Mary and Francis had never stepped aside to convince anyone of anything.

Here, then, the reward had been given to those who were self-absorbed, immoral, and socially inactive, and had been denied those who were unselfish, moral, and passionately active. And here, too, were the little children ignorant of all words, of all responsibilities, of every emotion but that of an inarticulate love, whom Jesus took in his arms, and in whom he saw the mirror of the sublime human heart. J

XXXI.

Here was a force which, except in relation to itself, saw no difference between morality and immorality, the active and the passive, the selfish and the unselfish.

One remnant of the social argument remained. Is it less than nothing that a man for one instant, by one word, departs from himself, if by so doing he can bring millions to the knowledge of love? Then I thought of the parable of Dives in hell, who at the last besought that Lazarus might be sent to his brothers from the dead: and the answer of Abraham, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." 7

In this I saw the pessimism of social philosophy: that the individual, in the last resort, cannot be assisted, cannot be other than a hopeless, lonely, inarticulate atom, utterly crushed by the dead weight of the universe; that above all, the individual is finally responsible for himself and is able to make nothing of this responsibility except in relation to an outer standard. The moment we compare we introduce a scale. The moment we consider the individual from the point of view of an achieved universe, an achieved society, he becomes also a fixed entity and of necessity a very small one, an atom. What, then, is the consolation of his responsibility? What is there but to take him into the fold, warm his feet, smother him into self-forgetfulness, give him the best, the only chance he can have, that of sharing the moral consolations of society? J

It is this which makes Christianity appear so inexorable, so defiant, so hard, so oblivious of reason, morality, common sense, of everything except that one little fugitive, inconclusive, inchoate thing, the human heart.

XXXII.

Sometimes, if we are swimming in the sea, or if we lie down in the long grass of a hillside where the wind rustles over us, the mind is lost in the body and we fall—how easily!—into an elemental scheme in which there is neither great nor small, beginning or ending—which has no scale, no criterion.

¶ Without responsibility even to ourselves we seem almost to understand that there is no such thing as failure and that our energy abides untroubled by an eternity whose one law is that of transformation. Is it less beautiful, we say, to be wind than to be flesh? What can go wrong? What is there but a longer or a briefer time before we shall cease to be one thing to become another?

‡ And at other times when we feel that we should be happier if our destiny were that of someone else, someone, especially, whose destiny we can see complete, in the past, we fail to see that in all happiness there is a kind of fatality. We leap for all the realities we have glimpse of: but the only elements we have to build upon are those that lie around us. In this we have no responsibility, for we climb upward on the steps that our unguided feet naturally find in front of them.

So much becomes our experience, our wisdom, our life.

¶ And if all action exists for this, why laboriously translate into action experience that has been lived already and comes to us like a pure gift, wisdom for which life has once been sacrificed? If I attempt to live the life of Hamlet, I shall have to ask, why am I not also living the life of Romeo?

But a man, so long as he is real, can have in him the dream of a world.

XXXIII.

As I began to see the emptiness of all ways of making the best of things, I realized too that there were moments in which I felt no love, in which I was cold, hard, irritated with everything surrounding me. Here was the final oppression and it sprang out of myself. Now more than ever, when everything was reduced to the self, the self felt its awful want. More than ever I was conscious of the

pressure, the narrowness of life which could not be relieved by the distractions of the moral world.

And accordingly since there was nothing but love which could relieve me I felt, in the absence of love, the absence of everything.

If in those moments when the outer world has ceased to mean anything to us, we could only know how near we are to the one great happiness!

For in those moments we have unconsciously prepared ourselves for love.

When everything has lost its meaning, when we have winnowed out of ourselves the capacity for all secondary, all outer consolations, when we have reached the inmost solitude and the heart is utterly starved, then we have cleaned house for the wonderful guest that never deserts us.

Nor is there one instant of waiting. There is a quick at the bottom of desolation. And in a flash we are free again and

"Feel through all this fleshly dress
Bright shoots of everlastingness."

Then for a moment we love the sparrows in the street and every man and thing we see.

Then we are willing to bear all things, to believe all things, to hope all things, to endure all things.

XXXIV.

Wonderful moments in which the exile returns again home, in which a word, a gesture transports the soul out of itself and into every least fragment of its brother elements! . . .

"How small a part of time they share,
That are so wondrous sweet and fair."

Something in us reverberates and rolls away over the whole wide world of human life, and we find ourselves reaching out, groping out among remembered sounds, remembered sights, above, beside, behind, sound beyond sound, wave beyond wave,

"Like echoes whispering where great armies be,"

and in dizziness and confusion we feel that we have for an instant had our two hands upon the whole current of significant things.

. . . The entire machinery of our significant memories is set in motion by some combination of outer events: long shadows, the perfume of dead roses, a clear bell ringing in the mountains, the song of a bird, solitude in crumbling cities.

For of such is the stuff of these radiant intimations.

And it is only moods that we remember, only moods in which we live, only moods that one heart offers to another. There is a pathos in realities because they are only inns along the road where the soul rests a moment before passing on. But what a pathos in the soul itself, which consists only of wistful rememberings of these inns where it has rested! while the realities remain, untouched, protected forever by silence, peace, unconsciousness.

Electric fantasies that melt and fade like butterflies in the atmosphere! Love itself can be for us only a mood. It will exist again, but it must pass in order that it may exist.

XXXV.

It is then that we turn to religion, to art, literature, music that through them we may work out of ourselves that which overburdens us and by expressing it release ourselves once more.

The true artist does not desire perfection in his work for its own sake, so that when it is finished he can with satisfaction contemplate a perfect thing. He works for perfection so that the pain which afflicts him may be expressed to the full, eradicated, cut out to the very roots, that he may if possible be finally free of it. And in our own work of whatever kind, so long as we do not see our way, so long as we are struggling blindly, we hold to it desperately in order that we may work it out. But when we have reached a point where everything goes well and we have attained a certain command over ourselves, we are happy and restored to ourselves, we feel free again. . . .

And our first impulse is to go away somewhere, anywhere, because we are no longer burdened with ourselves.

Since we must every hour be doing this, doing that, and since we feel the inner necessity of being everything at once, our destiny seems to imply a more excellent life which has its battles and its victories in the imagination.

XXXVI.

In literature I seemed to see a refuge.

These thoughts, these impulses, these desires, too conflicting and inconsistent for life to receive and contain—here I could live them to the uttermost, have them out, have my fling to the uttermost.

Here was a kind of vicarious life which demanded no consistency of me, never demanded that I should be one thing at the expense of another. Here was a life which had no barriers, no moralities, asked no questions, reconciled all modes of being with each other simply because the human heart had dreamed of them.

But even in literature there was a touch of propaganda, inasmuch as expression here too implied an audience. And this audience would necessarily be a haphazard gathering, large or small, of persons who would approach it from the social point of view. Here once more a man by expression committed himself, laid himself open to a new set of influences, all the more dangerous because they attacked his most sacred intentions, because they laid siege to his inmost personality.

In Shakespeare I thought that I should find a test case, for one reason that Shakespeare was a personality capable of withstanding any age; for a second, that the age in which he lived was weak in the social sense and strong in individualities. With him the defense was uncommonly strong, the attack uncommonly weak.

The people of his day were in the habit of expressing themselves. They had created the charming significance of May-day, with its dancing and rough music and lovemaking, that is to say, its expressiveness.

And it is only those who can in some measure express themselves and are accustomed to some kind of generous overflow, who can apprehend the nuances of things, ideas which are not implicitly expressed but thrown half-born and trailing with them vague hints of eternity from one heart into another.

Macaulay, for example, wrote for an age unused to the expressive life, and his ideas were hard, brilliant, finite, objective, rhetorical, overexpressed, humanly untrue.

But when we hear Jaques cross-examining Orlando of his love and asking, *What stature is she of?* and Orlando replies, *Just as high as my heart*, we know that Shakespeare in the childish delight and gallantry of that line was charmed with it because he knew that his audience too would be carried out of themselves by it, and that it was like playing some fanciful game together, he and they.

He could trust them, as one trusts an intimate friend. And, as with an intimate friend, he could lay aside formalities, and turn somersaults on the floor if he felt like it (as he frequently did, Launcelot Gobbo being just such a somersault), because he had no fear of the heavy paw being put upon him of social moralities and sentimentalities and desires for amusement, because he was only expected to be himself delightfully.

XXXVII.

But even Shakespeare who could, if any man, have had nothing to fear, writes in the sonnets:

"Alas, 'tis true, I have gone here and there,
And made myself a motley to the view,
Gored my own thoughts, sold cheap what is most dear,
Made old offenses of affections new."

When he wrote those lines, I think Shakespeare must have experienced that revulsion which always follows a violation of one's reserve, with which the soul smites us, reminding us of its own high chastity, its eternal solitude, its right of inviolable identity.

For every fine soul has this pride of solitude, a certain sense that ultimately it cannot pass over into other souls. We may give ourselves to those we love, but there is a point where we cannot give any more and where we cannot be any more received. And I am sure that this recognition must be especially poignant in those who write, who in a way give themselves to many. And so Shakespeare, even with his audience like a child playing with children, only the most expressive, the most inventive, the captain of them all, must have realized in moments of a sudden terror the unchildish and in a sense inhuman fact and responsibility of being an artist, one who

in some degree carves out his snow images in granite and makes of the blocks and ribbons about him not playthings of an hour, but playthings that the world and time are to look upon.

Thus he speaks of making himself a motley, that is of having decked himself in many colours for the crowd to choose between, some accepting him in red, others preferring him in yellow. Thinking the same thought the Psalmist also said: "They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them and cast lots upon my vesture." And again he said, "I am poured out like water." And again, "For none can keep alive his own soul."

XXXVIII.

Literature, then, like life, had its conditions. For what could literature be if it were less than one's whole self, the very nerve that quickens in the midst of one's being? It could only be what Verlaine scornfully calls it when he says:

"La nuance, pas la couleur,
Seulement la nuance—
Tout le reste est littérature,"—

all the rest, the cold things, the hard things, the unreal things—in a word, rhetoric.

I saw this all the more clearly when I turned to the literature of our own day. Evidently its chief energies were absorbed in the novel. Where, if not in Russia, had it stretched to the farthest limits the possibilities of what the novel can be? Beside the mighty novels of Tolstoi, Tourgenieff, Dostoievski there seemed to be a note of triviality about most of our western fiction, a nervous and finite compactness. Here was above all construction, the weaving and threading and balancing of situations, economies and suppressions, parings off, pushings together—art certainly, but art attained only by stifling that swift cry which expresses the anguish of the human situation.

Beside this I saw the Russian novel brooding on things, moving across life with all the cumulative aimlessness of a human soul, gathering to itself sensations, ideas, memories.

XXXIX.

The great fact about the Russian people appeared to me this—that they are the most inarticulate people in the world. These mighty novelists are the voices of the inarticulate, voices themselves not quite articulate, but struggling out of some chaotic depths, dragging their dreams out of the soil. Compared with them we of the western world express ourselves easily and toss ourselves to the wind. But they, who have no rhetoric and who cannot speak, accumulate feelings, emotions, thoughts which turn upon themselves within and grow rich and angry and prophetic until, too urgent for anything to stop them, they burst forth and pour out, turgid and volcanic, carving out of tremendous necessity a language all their own. Silent watchers of the elements, they know the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.

And this trait of Russian literature finds also a reflection in everything else that is great in the literature of our day. The mysterious forces of heredity, of sex, of race, of the soil, brooding over the modern mind and made more imminent and more mysterious by the discoveries of science, penetrate the works of Ibsen, of Maeterlinck, of Hauptmann and Sudermann, Zola and the writers of the Low Countries impregnated with the profound Germanic soul. And here for the first time we find literature of the highest order without style in its traditional sense as an independent aspect of the literary art. These are not literary men, in the proper sense, at all. They are men who write from the sheer pressure of life and to whom, as Whitman says, "after absorbing eras, temperaments, races, after knowledge, freedom, crimes, after clarifyings, elevations, and removing obstacles," there has come "the divine power to speak words."

XL.

Of all these mighty spirits Tolstoi appeared to me to have gone farthest in the region of literature and to have reached the conclusion of the literary life with a misery deeper than that of any other. More profoundly than they he had felt the pressure of life, and in his gigantic despair he felt the utter inadequacy of litera-

ture. . . . In his Confession he tells us with what sensations he finished *Anna Karénina*: "My despair reached such a height that I could do nothing but think, think of the horrible condition in which I found myself. . . . Questions never ceased multiplying and pressing for answers, and like lines converging all to one point, so these unanswerable questions pressed to one black spot, and with horror and a consciousness of my weakness I remained standing before this spot. Bodily, I was able to work at mowing hay as well as a peasant. Mentally, I could work for eighteen hours at a time without feeling any ill consequence. And yet I had come to this, that I could no longer live. . . . I saw only one thing—Death. Everything else was a lie."

The refuge of literature, the refuge of all vicarious forms of existence was inadequate for this man who desired nothing less than an explanation of life in its own terms. Devious paths had brought him to the first question. He saw that since the beginning of the world millions of human beings had solved the problem of life merely by living it. . . . It is so easy to sympathize with those who wish to reform institutions, so easy to grasp their issues, to surrender ourselves to the most arduous, the most exacting propaganda! So difficult for us to allow a new light to illuminate our own ways!

Once, near the woods of Meudon, I had encamped for the day with a friend, a landscape painter. I observed him stooping over, studying the scene from between his knees. It refreshed his eye, he explained, to see in reverse these objects with which he had grown more than familiar.

That is the way we should look at life when we had lived it through, if in all our wisdom we could for one instant return to it with our first love. . . . Tolstoi found that men were untrue to themselves in order to be true to society, while society returned to men nothing but distractions from life itself. Something like this is the teaching of Maeterlinck, of Ibsen in *Peer Gynt*. It is the teaching of every Odyssey since Homer.

* * * * *

Life with all its resurrections, life so manifold, so iridescent, floods over one—so sad, so merry, so lovable. The mind has such calm things in it, such green retreats!

Who presumes to give form to the blundering chaos of things?

I commit myself to an outward succession of events, a cast of thought. I am like one who has engaged a sculptor to make a mask of his face. In the course of time the mask will be finished, will be shaken off. What will remain there of the innumerable smiles that crossed my lips and eyes?

Yet under the plaster as it grows gradually cold I am free all the time. At the first moment, at the first contact of the damp material I fix my features with a bold rigidity. I give a strong impression to the mould. Then I leave it to perpetuate itself.

I release my lips. I open my eyes. Oh, the silence! oh, the dark solitude! and all that whirls within me.

*O pondus immensum;
o pelagus intransnatabile:
ubi nihil de me reperio quam in toto nihil.
Ubi est ergo latebra gloriæ;
ubi confidentia de virtute concepta?*

Im. Chr. III.

This book should be returned to
the Library on or before the last date
stamped below.

A fine is incurred by retaining it
beyond the specified time.

Please return promptly.

Cancelled
DEC 07 '70 H
3066304

5504218
CANCELLED

NOV 18 '76 H

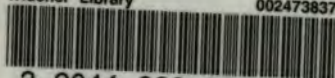
CANCELLED

BOOK DUE - WID
58 APR 15 1977
SEP - 3 1977

WIDENE
BOOK DUE
CANCELLED
MAY 1984
1162413
APR 26 1984

ALA 1043.92
The soul :
Widener Library

002473837



3 2044 080 937 402